

STATEMENT OF THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently amended) A collection of software tools embodied on a tangible computer readable medium coupled to a processor for acquiring unstructured data from diverse sources and structuring the data and/or determining similarity of content for the purpose of product information management, said collection comprising:

two or more tools selected from the group consisting of a web agent creator having means for creating a web agent to seek out and acquire product information on the world wide web, a web agent created by the web agent creator, the web agent having means for acquiring product information from the world wide web, a web agent manager having means for managing said web agent, an ontology-directed classifier having means for classifying product information, an ontology-directed extractor having means for extracting product information from content contained in unstructured textual product descriptions, and an ontology-directed matcher having means for matching product information extracted by the extractor through matching product categories and attributes, the tools providing a tangible result selected from the group consisting of a web agent having means for acquiring product information from the world wide web, classified product information, product information extracted from content contained in unstructured textual product descriptions, and information matched with product categories and attributes.

2. (original) The collection according to claim 1, wherein:

one or more of the tools are example driven through a graphical user interface.

3. (original) The collection according to claim 1, wherein:

said web agent creator has a web browser interface and a web agent is created by navigating to a web page of interest and selecting the kind of information to be extracted from the web page.

4. (currently amended) A collection of software tools embodied on a tangible computer readable medium coupled to a processor for acquiring data from diverse sources and/or structuring the data and/or determining similarity of content for the purpose of product information management, said collection comprising:

two or more tools selected from the group consisting of a web agent creator having means for creating a web agent to seek out and acquire product information on the world wide web, a web agent created by the web agent creator, the web agent having means for acquiring product information from the world wide web, a web agent manager having means for managing said web agent, an ontology-directed classifier having means for classifying product information, an ontology-directed extractor having means for extracting product information from content contained in unstructured textual product descriptions, and an ontology-directed matcher having means for matching product information extracted by the extractor through matching product categories and attributes, wherein

said web agent creator includes

a web browser user interface,

a pattern expression discovery algorithm coupled to said user interface,

a results editor coupled to said user interface and said pattern expression discovery algorithm,

an agent generator coupled to said user interface and said results editor, and

a form value editor coupled to said user interface and said agent generator,

the tools providing a tangible result selected from the group consisting of a web agent having means for acquiring product information from the world wide web, classified product information, product information extracted from content contained in unstructured textual product descriptions, and information matched with product categories and attributes.

5. (original) The collection of claim 4, wherein:

said user interface indicates text selected by the user interface to said pattern expression discovery algorithm, said results editor, said agent generator, and said form value editor.

6. (original) The collection of claim 4, wherein:

said pattern expression discovery algorithm is an XPath discovery algorithm,

said user interface indicates a DOM tree of text selected by the user interface to said XPath discovery algorithm, said results editor, said agent generator, and said form value editor.

7. (original) The collection of claim 5, wherein:

said pattern expression discovery algorithm generates a pattern expression based on the results received from the user interface and communicates that pattern expression to the results editor.

8. (original) The collection of claim 6, wherein:

said XPath discovery algorithm generates an XPath based on the DOM tree received from the user interface and communicates that XPath to the results editor.

9. (original) The collection of claim 7, wherein:

the results editor receives pattern expressions from the pattern expression discovery algorithm and accepts input from the user interface to identify the nature of the selected text.

10. (original) The collection of claim 8, wherein:

the results editor receives XPath expressions from the XPath discovery algorithm and accepts input from the user interface to identify the nature of the selected text.

11. (original) The collection of claim 8, wherein:

the form value editor receives input from the user interface and provides output to the agent generator including instructions and data to be used by the agent generated by the agent generator to fill out web based forms in order to reach the source of data to be extracted by the agent.

12. (original) The collection of claim 11, wherein:

the pattern expression discovery algorithm takes as its input a set of items corresponding to the text highlighted by the user interface, identifies the items, and determines corresponding data extractor and isolator expressions.

13. (original) The collection of claim 11, wherein:

the pattern expression discovery algorithm is an XPath discovery algorithm, the XPath discovery algorithm takes as its input a set of nodes corresponding to the text highlighted by the user interface, identifies locator nodes and grouping nodes based on the input set of nodes, and determines corresponding data extractor and isolator expressions.

14. (original) The collection according to claim 12, wherein:

the corresponding data extractor and isolator expressions are used to form a navigation map to be used by the agent to find all nodes that match the isolator expression, and for each node matching the isolator expression, find a match for each of the data extractor expressions.

15. (original) The collection according to Claim 1, wherein:

the ontology directed classifier uses a taxonomy provided by a tree of classes and subclasses generated using an ontology management system.

16. (original) The collection according to Claim 15, wherein:

the ontology directed classifier performs taxonomy token weighting, node weighting for descriptions, weight propagation and normalizations, and determining the best class and subtree of said taxonomy to which an item can be classified.

17. (original) The collection according to claim 1, wherein:

said ontology directed extractor takes unstructured text descriptions about an item as input and produces a set of structured property values about the item as output.

18. (currently amended) A web agent creator embodied on a tangible computer readable medium coupled to a processor for creating a web agent to acquire product information from the world wide web, said web agent creator comprising:

a web browser user interface,

a pattern expression discovery algorithm coupled to said user interface, said algorithm including means for discovering patterns of product information,

a results editor coupled to said user interface and said pattern expression discovery algorithm, said results editor having means for editing product information,

an agent generator coupled to said user interface and said results editor, said generator having means for generating said web agent having characteristics determined by said algorithm, and

a form value editor coupled to said user interface and said agent generator, said form value editor having means for setting parameters of said web agent,

said web agent creator providing the tangible result of a web agent executable on a processor which together acquire product information from the world wide web.

19. (original) The web agent creator according to claim 18, wherein:

said user interface indicates text selected by the user interface to said pattern expression discovery algorithm, said results editor, said agent generator, and said form value editor.

20. (original) The web agent creator according to claim 18, wherein:

said pattern expression discovery algorithm is an XPath discovery algorithm,
said user interface indicates a DOM tree of text selected by the user interface to said XPath discovery algorithm, said results editor, said agent generator , and said form value editor.

21. (original) The web agent creator according to claim 19, wherein:

said pattern expression discovery algorithm generates a pattern expression based on the results received from the user interface and communicates that pattern expression to the results editor.

22. (original) The web agent creator according to claim 20, wherein:

said XPath discovery algorithm generates an XPath based on the DOM tree received from the user interface and communicates that XPath to the results editor.

23. (original) The web agent creator according to claim 18, wherein:

the results editor receives pattern expressions from the pattern expression discovery algorithm and accepts input from the user interface to identify the nature of the selected text.

24. (original) The web agent creator according to claim 20, wherein:

the results editor receives XPath expressions from the XPath discovery algorithm and accepts input from the user interface to identify the nature of the selected text.

25. (original) The web agent creator according to claim 18, wherein:

the form value editor receives input from the user interface and provides output to the agent generator including instructions and data to be used by the agent generated by the agent generator to fill out web based forms in order to reach the source of data to be extracted by the agent.

26. (original) The web agent creator according to claim 18, wherein:

the pattern expression discovery algorithm takes as its input a set of items corresponding to the text highlighted by the user interface, identifies the items, and determines corresponding data extractor and isolator expressions.

27. (original) The web agent creator according to claim 18, wherein:

the pattern expression discovery algorithm is an XPath discovery algorithm, the XPath discovery algorithm takes as its input a set of nodes corresponding to the text highlighted by the user interface, identifies locator nodes and grouping nodes based on the input set of nodes, and determines corresponding data extractor and isolator expressions.

28. (original) The web agent creator according to claim 26, wherein

the corresponding data extractor and isolator expressions are used to form a navigation map to be used by the agent to find all nodes that match the isolator expression, and for each node matching the isolator expression, find a match for each of the data extractor expressions.

29. (currently amended) An ontology directed classifier embodied on a tangible computer readable medium coupled to a processor for use with an ontology management system including means for managing product information, said ontology directed classifier comprising:

means for receiving a product information related taxonomy as input; and

means for generating a tree of product information classes and subclasses as tangible output for use by the ontology management system to classify product information.

30. (original) The ontology directed classifier according to claim 29, further comprising:

- means for taxonomy token weighting,
- means for node weighting for descriptors
- means for weight propagation and normalization, and
- means for determining the best class and sub-tree of said taxonomy to which an item can be classified.

31. (canceled)

32. (canceled)

33. (currently amended) An ontology directed matcher embodied on a tangible computer readable medium coupled to a processor for use with an ontology management system to match similar products using product attributes and their values, said ontology directed matcher comprising:

- means for describing products based on a structured set of properties;
- means for defining the relative importance of said properties in describing said products; and
- means for scoring the degree of equivalence of products based on said definitions, said matcher producing the tangible output of a listing of products paired with scores.

34. (original) An ontology directed matcher according to claim 33, wherein:

aid structured set of properties in defined by ontology attributes provided by the ontology management system.

35. (original) An ontology directed matcher according to claim 34, wherein:

said means for defining the relative importance of said properties is based on weight attached to a matching function for each said property that takes as input the values of said attributes defining that property for two different items and outputs a number indicating the similarity of these input values.

36. (original) An ontology directed matcher according to claim 35, wherein:

said means for scoring the degree of equivalence of items includes means for multiplying the said output values of all said matching functions by said respective weights and summing these products.

37. (original) The collection according to claim 1, further comprising:

a validation method applied to one or more tools in the collection to determine the accuracy of the tool's output by manually checking the accuracy of a statistical sampling of tool output from specific tool input.

38. (original) The collection according to claim 37, wherein:

said validation method determines an Acceptable Quality Level (AQL) as defined in standard ANSI/ASQC Z1.4-1993 by performing multiple sampling procedures at different AQLs as defined in said standard until the boundary AQL level is found below which the sampling procedure fails and above which the sampling procedure succeeds.